

First Quarter Activity Report

Province of Alberta



06 BUDGET

STRENGTHENING TODAY,
Securing Tomorrow



2006 - 2007 Quarterly Budget Report

August 2006

Alberta

Updating Albertans

In Budget 2006, the government reinforced its 20-year strategic plan to build on the province's strong fiscal and economic environment and create more opportunities for Albertans and Alberta businesses to succeed. *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise* is the action plan that will help the government achieve its vision of: "A vibrant and prosperous province where Albertans enjoy a superior quality of life and are confident about the future for themselves and their children." The strategic plan is based on four pillars:

- **Unleashing innovation** focuses on becoming a world leader in innovation, research, development, and commercialization of new ideas.
- **Leading in learning** requires making sure Albertans have the opportunities they need to learn, adapt, and develop new knowledge and new skills.
- **Competing in a global marketplace** is about creating a business and investment environment that is recognized around the world as an excellent place to do business.
- **Making Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit** means providing services and opportunities to people in an environment in which they can contribute their talents and create a quality of life that meets their dreams.

The purpose of this quarterly activity report is to show Albertans what activities the government undertook over the past three months in support of this vision. The following pages include some of those activities from each of the government departments.

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UNLEASHING INNOVATION

Albertans are pioneers - known for innovative thinking and a "can do" attitude. It's this spirit that makes Alberta a leader on so many fronts. Focusing on research, technology, and innovation allows Albertans to develop and produce new knowledge-based products, maximize traditional industries, and broaden Alberta's economy. In the first quarter, the government:

- **Implemented** the first of two phases of the Mineral Royalty System, an automated revenue collection system that improves the efficiency and accuracy of royalty collection from coal and mineral commodities. (Energy)
- **Initiated** the implementation of a cross-ministry project entitled *Collaborative Core Infrastructure Using SuperNet for IP Video-conferencing*. The project leverages the Alberta SuperNet and the medium of video-conferencing to improve access to many services in different sectors, particularly for Albertans living in rural and remote areas. (Education; Health and Wellness; Restructuring and Government Efficiency)
- **Launched** the Alberta Soil Information Viewer, an online tool detailing 64 million acres of Alberta, allowing farmers as well as agricultural and environmental consultants to better understand and apply best management practices for the conservation of Alberta's rich soil resources. (Agriculture, Food and Rural Development)
- **Announced** funding for 10 projects under the Western Economic Partnership Agreement at a federal-provincial press conference on May 23, 2006. \$16.6 million in joint funding supports projects that enhance innovation and value-added industries, regional economic development and sustainable communities. (Economic Development; Innovation and Science)
- **Launched** the Virtual Interactive Tour of the Alberta Legislature to support the new social studies program and to celebrate 100 years of democracy in Alberta. (Education)
- **Coordinated** a series of 10 live, interactive video-conferencing sessions with Alberta schools as part of *Alberta at the Smithsonian* in Washington, D.C. The sessions demonstrated how the SuperNet is being used in the province for innovative educational projects and programming. (Education)

- **Amended** the Cottage Wine Policy to add mead (honey wine) to the list of fruit wine products that can be produced, packaged and sold directly from Alberta farms. The amendment builds on the creation of the cottage wine industry announced by government last year. (Gaming)
- **Joined** an elite group of Canadian jurisdictions in adopting the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Silver standard—a world-recognized environmentally friendly standard—for designing new government-owned and supported buildings. The LEED Silver standard conserves energy, saves taxpayers money, and reduces the buildings' impact on the environment. (Infrastructure and Transportation)
- **Supported** the Alberta Research Council's development of the first cattle health monitoring system that uses a collar and ear tag to monitor cattle health and deliver the information in real time via the Internet. This helps farmers find and treat health issues in their animals quickly and with precision. (Innovation and Science)
- **Launched** the \$120 million state-of-the-art National Institute for Nanotechnology facility in Edmonton, collaborating with the University of Alberta. The facility includes "Canada's quietest space" and high-tech equipment, providing optimal conditions for nano-scale research and collaboration. This will help make Alberta a world leader in this highly sophisticated and specialized science. (Innovation and Science)
- **Proclaimed** the *Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act*. This legislation enhances the role of the community boards that administer services through the Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) program, while improving the province's ability to better coordinate all the programs that provide support to Albertans with disabilities. (Seniors and Community Supports)
- **Supported** efforts led by the Utilities Consumer Advocate to simplify electricity and natural gas energy contracts, which resulted in a widely used plain language energy contract. (Government Services)
- **Encouraged** the development of regional municipal water and wastewater systems by funding a larger share of their capital costs. Under the new \$54 million *Water for Life - Regional Water and Wastewater Partnership Initiative*, the Alberta government covers 90 per cent of the capital costs of building regional municipal water and wastewater pipelines. (Infrastructure and Transportation)

LEADING IN LEARNING

Albertans know a solid education builds the foundation for a strong and prosperous society. Alberta's education system continues to be among the best in the world and staying at the forefront means providing students with the tools they need to achieve their potential. Investments in universities, colleges, and technical institutes are increasing, so they can provide high quality, affordable post-secondary education. This, in turn, creates opportunities for life-long learners to adapt their skills and develop new ones. A well-educated workforce is key to Alberta's continued economic success. In the first quarter, the government:

- **Released** the final report of the *A Learning Alberta* steering committee. The report was based on last year's consultation process designed to develop a 20-year strategic framework for Alberta's advanced education system, which involved input from nearly 3,000 Albertans. It includes a long range policy framework for Alberta's advanced education system, as well as specific recommendations in key areas. (Advanced Education)
- **Introduced** the Millennium Alberta Rural Incentive Bursaries that will provide 8,100 post secondary students from rural Alberta \$1,000 each towards their post-secondary education. The program is a partnership between the Alberta government and the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. (Advanced Education)
- **Launched** a new online database to help Alberta post-secondary students more easily find scholarships, bursaries and awards that support their learning. (Advanced Education)
- **Opened** three feature exhibitions at the Royal Alberta Museum that offer Albertans insight into our past and other cultures: *From Geisha to Dina: The Kimonos of Ichimaru*; *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Mail-Order Catalogue in Canada*; and *The Frontier in Bronze: Sculptures by Bob Scriver*. (Community Development)
- **Allocated** nearly \$400,000 through Northern LINKS funding for schools, school jurisdictions, Métis Settlements and First Nations to carry out campus tours and student liaisons for the 2006-07 fiscal year. (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development)
- **Released** the *Provincial Surveillance and Compliance Summary* for 2005, reporting that industry's compliance rate with major Alberta Energy and Utilities Board regulations reached 98.2 per cent in 2005, up from 97 per cent in 2003. (Energy - Alberta Energy and Utilities Board)

- **Launched** the International Trade Seminar Series to keep the information and communication technology sector informed of market opportunities within targeted international markets. Three sessions were held focusing on Hong Kong/China, Taiwan, and Korea. Future sessions will gather market intelligence, enhance market awareness, and facilitate business matching between incoming delegations and Alberta industry. (Economic Development)
- **Launched** the High School Completion Initiative, a series of youth roundtable discussions and an online questionnaire for all Albertans, which will culminate in a September 2006 province-wide Symposium involving youth, parents, educators, business leaders and community organizations. The consultation will develop a provincial strategy and encourage community involvement in improving high school completion. (Education)
- **Received** a 2006 Canadian New Media Award for Excellence in Learning for SortItOut!, a resource for Alberta students and educators about waste management developed in partnership with ACCESS TV and the City of Edmonton (www.sortitout.ca). (Environment)
- **Supported** 13 coalbed methane public information sessions held across the province to help Albertans better understand coalbed methane development and the different roles government, health authorities and industry play. (Environment)
- **Supported** the opening of the University of Alberta's Agri-Food Discovery Place, positioning the province as a world research leader in food safety, value-added food and agri-industrial products. (Agriculture, Food and Rural Development)

COMPETING IN A GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

Alberta has made great strides in encouraging a broader economic base. Low taxes and the availability of untapped markets to export and promote our goods, services, knowledge, and technology, play a vital role in achieving recognition as an excellent place to do business. Making Alberta's infrastructure the best in the world is also important, so citizens and businesses have the foundation they need to compete in a global marketplace. In the first quarter, the government:

- **Hosted** a highly successful *Alberta Week in Washington* program as part of *Alberta at the Smithsonian*. Economic forums and meetings with key U.S. decision-makers and political leaders generated unprecedented national and American interest and media coverage for Alberta as a trusted partner and a source of secure energy. (International and Intergovernmental Relations; Community Development; Agriculture, Food and Rural Development)
- **Accepted** the final report of the Oil Sands Consultation Advisory Group. The report contained recommendations and a suggested model for consulting on the development of the oil sands in a coordinated, balanced and environmentally sound way. (Energy)
- **Opened** the Alberta exhibit at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. to showcase Alberta's work life, performing arts and cultural heritage. The festival annually attracts upwards of a million visitors. (Community Development; International and Intergovernmental Relations)
- **Completed** the consultation on coalbed methane and publicly released the Coalbed Methane/Natural Gas in Coal Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Committee's final report, which contains 44 recommendations on future coalbed methane development, and an action plan is in place to implement 32 of the 44 recommendations. (Energy)
- **Operated** the Alberta International Business Centre at the 2006 Global Petroleum Show in Calgary. The Centre attracted over 4,400 international delegates of the show's 52,000 registered attendees. With Alberta Economic Development's partners (Alberta Energy, Export Development Canada, Industry Canada, Travel Alberta, and the Canadian Heavy Oil Association), the Alberta International Business Centre provided delegates with access to provincial and federal government officials and industry leaders, and information at seminars on market intelligence, heavy oil, and energy technology. (Economic Development; Energy)
- **Promoted** Alberta's biotechnology sector to international audiences at the BIO 2006 conference held in Chicago, showcasing innovation from companies and government agencies including therapeutic drugs for cancer, hepatitis and multiple sclerosis; regenerative medicine; plant-made pharmaceuticals; and contract research and bio-manufacturing. (Innovation and Science)
- **Hosted** the annual British Columbia-Alberta joint Cabinet meeting, at which the two provinces signed the *British Columbia-Alberta Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement* (TILMA), a free trade agreement that creates Canada's second largest economic region. (International and Intergovernmental Relations)

- **Promoted** Alberta's information and communications technology expertise in diagnostic sensing and surveillance at the Alberta ICT Forum, held at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C. in June 2006. Alberta companies demonstrated applications ranging from security to logistics to healthcare. (Innovation and Science)
- **Released** four reports related to marketing choice for western Canadian grain farmers. Two of the studies explored alternative proposals for a new Canadian Wheat Board business model that would be consistent with the goals of marketing choice. The studies looked at what business a new entity could be engaged in, and how it could be structured. The reports concluded that under the right business model, the Canadian Wheat Board could successfully compete in an open market. (Agriculture, Food and Rural Development)
- **Welcomed** 14 delegations to Alberta—two each from Germany, China and Korea, one each from Japan, Russia, India, Croatia, France, Trinidad & Tobago, the Dominican Republic, and Australia. Arranged meetings with government and Legislative officials, Ministers and MLAs. (International and Intergovernmental Relations)
- **Worked** in full consultation with the Alberta forest industry to protect Alberta's interests in the softwood lumber trade agreement negotiations between Canada and the United States. (International and Intergovernmental Relations; Sustainable Resource Development)
- **Signed** a memorandum of understanding with New Brunswick to allow for the joint fostering of bioenergy initiatives. The agreement calls for cooperation and exchange of information between the two provinces to encourage the development, and commercialization of bio-based fuels and energy. This will allow for increased value chain opportunities for farmers in both provinces. (Agriculture, Food and Rural Development)
- **Created** a new Alberta-Smithsonian internship program through the University of Alberta that will provide opportunities for 50 post secondary students to gain valuable international academic and life experience. The \$300,000 program will provide 10 internships per year over the next five years at one of the 28 Smithsonian centres throughout the world. (Advanced Education)
- **Concluded** public consultations to help create *Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce*, Alberta's long-term labour force development strategy. The strategy will be used to address Alberta's skill and labour shortages. (Human Resources and Employment)
- **Completed** negotiations on a federal-provincial agreement to allow international students who study at Alberta public post-secondary institutions to work off-campus. Allowing international students to work off-campus helps address labour shortages and gives students an opportunity to see what a great place Alberta is to live and work. (Advanced Education; Human Resources and Employment)
- **Partnered** with Industry Canada, the Government of Ontario, and the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters to enhance the profile of manufacturing opportunities stemming from the Alberta oil sands developments. Through the development of an 8-page brochure and a business opportunity matching web site at www.icosmo.ca, the partners connect Alberta-based companies with qualified companies across Canada. This initiative is aimed at ensuring more manufacturing work from the oil sands stays within Canada. (Economic Development)

MAKING ALBERTA THE BEST PLACE TO LIVE, WORK, AND VISIT

Albertans' vision is one in which the province remains debt-free, with accessible, quality health care and education, safe and caring communities, and an environment that is preserved and protected. Alberta is a place that has something for everyone. The province is known for its spectacular scenery, rich cultural heritage, and exciting history. Those attractions draw visitors from around the world and keep them coming back year after year. In the first quarter, the government:

Promoting Health and Wellness

- **Expanded** the Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy from three pilot site communities (Lethbridge and surrounding First Nations, High Prairie and surrounding Métis Settlements, and Eden Valley First Nation) to two additional pilot site communities (Hobbema and Dene Tha'). The Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy supports communities in actions that address youth suicide in their own community. (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development)
- **Implemented** new and updated standards for continuing care health and accommodation services, laying the groundwork for higher quality health care and quality of life for Albertans receiving continuing care services. (Health and Wellness)
- **Approved** the Pharmacists Profession Regulation that will allow pharmacists to prescribe some drug treatments, continue prescriptions made by other health practitioners, and administer injectable drug treatments, such as vaccines. (Health and Wellness)
- **Announced** the Health Quality Council of Alberta, a new provincial statutory board. Albertans will benefit from more coordinated province-wide programs that focus on patient safety and quality health care. (Health and Wellness)
- **Launched** SummerActive 2006, a national initiative to encourage regular physical activity, healthy eating, a tobacco-free lifestyle and participation in sports. During the six-week campaign, Alberta hosted 63 events with 91,874 participants. (Community Development)

Supporting Families and Children

- **Completed**, in collaboration with five school jurisdictions, arrangements for five schools to implement integrated mental health support projects. (Education; Health and Wellness)
- **Expanded** the Intake and Caseload Management program to help Albertans involved in legal disputes over parenting, child visitation rights and guardianship of children. The goal of the program is to help people through the court process and perhaps resolve disputes without a court appearance. (Justice)
- **Increased** the maximum financial benefit available to Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program clients from \$950 to \$1,000 per month, as recommended by the MLA AISH Review. (Seniors and Community Supports)
- **Responded** to the need for more housing options due to rapid population growth in the past few years. The Alberta Social Housing Corporation sold a 302-acre parcel of land in Fort McMurray, which will facilitate the development of up to 2,200 new housing units, including 300 affordable housing units. (Seniors and Community Supports)
- **Announced** a rate increase for foster parents to support them in their efforts to help raise and support children in government care. Foster parents saw an increase in skill fees, as well as increases in the basic maintenance, recreation and vacation/camp allowances for all children in care. (Children's Services)
- **Launched** the Bullying Prevention Strategy Youth Campaign. The initiative includes an advertising campaign and a 24-hour helpline. The helpline is operated by trained counsellors and was created for children and youth who feel they have nowhere else to turn. The advertising campaign, Stand Up and Stop Bullying, encourages youth to intervene in a safe way when they see someone being bullied. (Education; Children's Services)
- **Developed** a new campaign to provide teens with information about online safety through movie theatre advertising and a new website. The website, www.weron2u.ca, is written from a peer-to-peer perspective. It includes information about predator tactics, safety tips and true stories. (Children's Services)
- **Introduced** a new service bundle to the Service Alberta website, making it easier and more convenient for immigrants to find relevant programs and services. (Government Services)
- **Unveiled** the Alberta Works debit card pilot program. The program makes it easier for Alberta Works clients without bank accounts to receive their benefits. (Human Resources and Employment)

Building Stronger and Safer Communities

- **Developed** regulations that align with and support Alberta's Counter Terrorism Crisis Management Plan, working in partnership with security and law-enforcement organizations to ensure effective communication and information exchange, and ensuring all energy companies have a terrorism mitigation strategy and response plan. (Energy - Alberta Energy and Utilities Board)
- **Hosted** workshops with municipalities to help enhance their understanding of the cost of providing safe, secure supplies of drinking water, a goal of *Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability*. (Environment)
- **Hosted** the second *Alberta Roundtable on Violence In and Around Licensed Premises* identifying priorities such as improved education and training, potentially higher licensing standards and more research to help curb the growing problems of violence around bars and lounges across the province. (Gaming)
- **Opened** a second Responsible Gambling Centre at the Deerfoot Inn and Casino in Calgary to provide on-site information and assistance for gamblers. Supported by AADAC staff, the centres are part of a two-year pilot project to help raise awareness of problem gambling and encourage responsible behaviour. (Gaming)
- **Introduced** new security measures at the entrance to courthouses as part of the province's three-year comprehensive court security plan to improve the safety and security of Albertans who access our courthouses. (Justice; Solicitor General and Public Security)
- **Launched** the awareness campaign "Under 18? All bets are off!" to ensure all lottery ticket retailers are requesting proof of age from anyone purchasing or cashing in lottery tickets who appears to be a minor. (Gaming)
- **Launched** the Alberta BearSmart program which encourages all Albertans who live, work and play in bear country to take personal responsibility in reducing human-bear encounters. (Sustainable Resource Development)
- **Issued** over 290 Community Facility Enhancement Program and Community Initiatives Program grants through the Alberta Lottery Fund. These grants support various projects throughout the province, including funding for the Autism Calgary Association's family and community outreach programs (\$35,000); facility upgrades at the Ardrossan Memorial Hall (\$39,338) and a youth empowerment program on the Sucker Creek First Nation in High Prairie (\$27,960). (Gaming)
- **Released** the 2006 West Nile Virus Response Plan outlining the province's plans to respond to West Nile this summer. (Health and Wellness; Environment; Sustainable Resource Development; Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; and Municipal Affairs)
- **Announced** the investment of \$176 million in urban and rural infrastructure through the Canada-Alberta Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (CAMRIF). This joint federal-provincial initiative helps contribute to a better quality of life for Albertans by enabling communities to improve local roads, drinking water systems and other municipal infrastructure. (Infrastructure and Transportation)

- **Began** construction on three major intersection improvements on Highway 63 in Fort McMurray to help reduce traffic congestion. The \$18.5 million improvements will be completed by this fall. (Infrastructure and Transportation)
- **Supported** a community initiative to introduce a new specialized domestic violence court in Airdrie. As the first circuit court location, it will serve the community with quicker access to justice, more targeted services and counseling for both victims and the accused. (Justice)
- **Supported** 302 municipalities with \$13.4 million in Unconditional Municipal Grants to address municipal priorities. (Municipal Affairs)
- **Funded** road maintenance projects worth \$10 million on Highways 63, 69 and 881 in the Wood Buffalo area. The roadwork includes repaving more than 18 kilometres of Highway 63 south of Mariana Lake, and maintenance repairs to the deck of the Grant MacEwan Bridge in Fort McMurray. (Infrastructure and Transportation)
- **Introduced** amendments to the *Local Authorities Election Act* to promote integrity and public confidence in Alberta's municipal elections by creating a more secure and transparent election process. Amendments included changes to special ballot procedures, voter identification, campaign processes, and eligibility of candidates convicted of an offence under the *Local Authorities Election Act*. (Municipal Affairs)
- **Released** the Alberta Fire Commissioner's Statistical Report for 2004. The report shows how fires are impacting the province, allowing fire and emergency service organizations to more effectively target their fire prevention initiatives. (Municipal Affairs)
- **Introduced** renewed vision and value statements to guide the work of the Alberta Public Service. Having a shared vision and common values will help brand the provincial government as an employer and assist in the attraction and retention of employees to the public service. It will also support the government in continuing to achieve its goal of developing and delivering high-quality program and services to Albertans. (Human Resources and Employment - Personnel Administration Office)
- **Distributed** over \$500,000 in Alberta community crime prevention grants to local projects across the province. Projects ranged from initiatives to reduce family violence, bullying, and elder abuse, to programs that support youth and Aboriginals in their community. Grant recipients included non-profit organizations and associations, and community-based coalitions and networks. (Solicitor General and Public Security)
- **Provided** over \$360,000 in Alberta community restorative justice grants to 16 initiatives across the province. The grants were used for programs such as victim-offender mediation, restorative justice training and leadership development in schools and establishing an Aboriginal justice circle. Restorative justice programs are used as an alternative or supplement to any sentence such as house arrest, probation or jail term and can be initiated at any time during the criminal justice process. (Solicitor General and Public Security)

- **Announced** \$600,000 in annual funding to HomeFront, a family violence program designed to provide a coordinated community response to domestic violence. HomeFront is a partnership between community agencies and the criminal justice system in Calgary. The agency provides caseworkers to encourage, comfort and support victims of family violence. (Children's Services)
- **Amended** the *Real Estate Act* and the *Land Titles Act* to aid in the fight against mortgage fraud in Alberta. (Government Services)
- **Participated** in and promoted North American Occupational Safety and Health Week. Activities were held across the province to focus the attention of employers, employees and the general public on recognizing and eliminating hazards in the workplace. (Human Resources and Employment)
- **Appointed** members to a Resolution Advisory Panel to review the Alberta government's efforts to clean up the Turner Valley Gas Plant and provide advice on the future of the site. (Community Development)
- **Provided** \$1 million to the Southern Alberta Pediatric Hostel Society from the Alberta Lottery Fund for a new Ronald McDonald House on the University of Calgary campus. (Gaming)

Protecting Alberta's Natural and Cultural Heritage

- **Hosted** a celebratory National Aboriginal Day event on June 22, in Edmonton. A variety of community events celebrating National Aboriginal Day were supported throughout Alberta. (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development)
- **Opened** nine seasonal Travel Alberta Visitor Information Centres for the summer. Travel counsellors help visitors plan their vacations and encourage them to discover natural attractions, historic sites, activities, and events across the province. (Economic Development)
- **Released** the *Alberta's Festival and Events Guide 2006*. Distributed to 350,000 households in Alberta, the guide contains information and encourages readers to participate in cultural events across the province. (Economic Development)
- **Amended** the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* to support regulatory streamlining and implementation of Sustainable Resource and Environmental Management. (Environment)
- **Opened** an Alberta Environment office at Lake Wabamun to oversee continued cleanup efforts and participated in several information sessions to keep residents informed of progress. (Environment)
- **Cleaned** 5,266 kilometres of highway through the volunteer-driven annual Highway Cleanup. Participants collected 29,661 bags of garbage from highway rights-of-way, which earned them \$198,000 for their organizations. (Infrastructure and Transportation)

- **Partnered** with *CrimeStoppers* and Global television to encourage Albertans to report actions in forested areas that may have led to a wildfire. A series of public service announcements will help Sustainable Resource Development obtain information on human-caused wildfires, and educate the public that these activities are fineable offences under the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act*. (Sustainable Resource Development)
- **Engaged** over 350 stakeholders in the Integrated Land Management consultation process that will explore ways to reduce, manage and reclaim the impacts of development and human activity on public land. (Sustainable Resource Development)
- **Hosted** the Alberta Mountain Pine Beetle Summit in Calgary to discuss appropriate strategies to limit the spread of the mountain pine beetles at different levels of infestation in Alberta's pine forests. (Sustainable Resource Development)
- **Opened** the Dinosaur Provincial Park Visitor Centre and the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation at Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park. The centres will provide interactive, interpretive and environmental education programming to enhance visitor experiences. (Community Development)
- **Finalized** the management plan for Peter Lougheed and Spray Valley Provincial Parks, and released a draft management plan for the Sheep Valley protected areas for public feedback. (Community Development)

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